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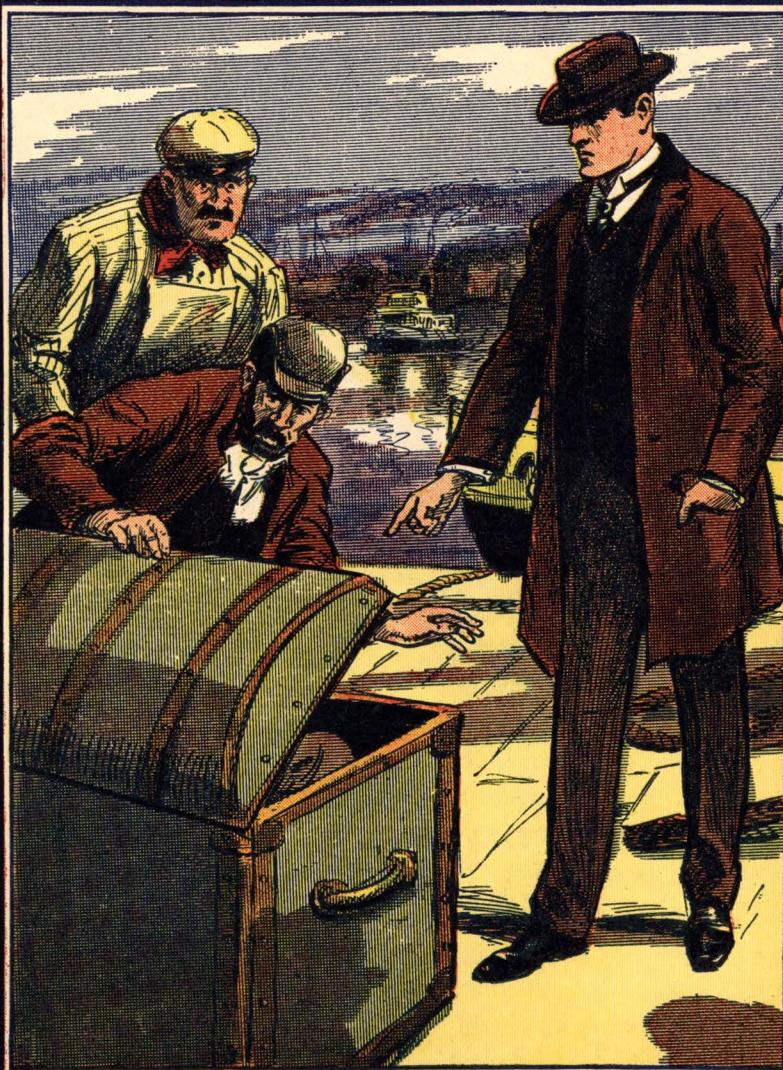
SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE STORIES FROM
FAMOUS CHIEFS

THE NOTE-BOOKS OF
OF POLICE



THE HEAD HUNTER
or Steve Manley's Secret Mission
BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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SHIELD WEEKLY



TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

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NEW YORK, April 20, 1901.

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The Head Hunter;

OR,

STEVE MANLEY'S SECRET MISSION.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS CRIME.

"Haul that infernal trunk out of the way, one of you lubbers! What's it doing there, anyhow?"

"I dunno, sir!"

"Whose is it?"

"Couldn't tell yer, sir."

"Don't any of you know where it came from?"

"I don't, cap'n."

"Nuther do I."

" 'Twas here first thing this morning, sir. I was sittin' on it afore daybreak."

"Yes, and you've all had a whack at sitting on it. You're better sitters, to a man, than you are workers. Lay hold, there, two of you, and run it out back. It's in the way."

This interchange of words occurred early one recent morning on one of the river landings in the city of Pittsburg, and within a half-mile of what is known as the Point.

The man evidently in authority, whose gruff words had been addressed to a half-score of the rough-looking laborers who hang about the river front in search of employment, was a burly, middle-aged man named Luscom, and was master of the lighter or barge which was then hauled up at the landing to be unladen.

The object which had occasioned his noisy disapproval was merely an old trunk of moderate size, tied with a rope, and which plainly was in the way of the work of unloading soon to be begun.

In response to Luscom's command two of

the men seized hold of the trunk at either end to remove it back upon the landing and out of the way.

Before it could be raised, however, one of the men started up with a sudden cry of alarm.

"There's something wrong here!"

"What do you say?" yelled Luscom, from the barge.

"The bottom's covered with blood! Look at me hands!"

And the man, with dismay and aversion pictured in his rough face, held out both of his hands to be seen.

Both palms, where he had seized hold of the bottom of the trunk, were stained red with half-congealed blood.

Luscom sprang down from the rail of the barge and hurriedly joined the gang of men who quickly had gathered nearer the doubtful object.

Consternation and misgivings were portrayed in every face.

Angry words had been turned to gruesome interest, and the strange trunk now was endowed with all the qualities of sudden and startling mystery.

"See if there is any name on it!" cried Luscom, as he approached.

"I don't find any."

"No card or tag?"

"Divil a card or tag."

"Pull off the rope and open her up," suggested one of the men.

"That's the stuff!" cried another. "Mebbe there has been a murder committed."

"If there has, you guys ain't the parties to meddle with the trunk. Let it alone and send for the chief of detectives."

All hands turned quickly to look at the person who had so curtly put in his oar, and beheld a youngster with sharp blue eyes and a very bright and determined face for one of his years.

It was Steve Manley, the boy inspector of Chief O'Mara's force of local detectives.

He had seen the gang gathered about the trunk, and ran down from the street to learn the occasion.

None of the men knew him by sight, however, and one bluntly demanded:

"Who in thunder are you?"

"What's the odds who I am?" retorted Steve. "I know what I'm talking about."

"Do you know anything about this trunk?" asked Luscom, suspiciously.

"I know only what I see, and if there is anything wrong with it you'd better let it stand where it is," said Steve, decidedly.

"I guess the boy's right," said Luscom. "Here, Malloy, run up to the office and tell the clerk to telephone the police."

The man addressed hastened up the landing and vanished into the office of the storage building.

Steve Manley waited about without disclosing his connection with the police department, yet kept an eye on the mysterious trunk to make sure it was not further disturbed.

None of the men now seemed inclined to handle the dismal object, however, and at the end of a quarter-hour, Inspector Garrity was seen hurrying down the landing.

As he approached he caught sight of Steve, but the latter at once made a secret sign to him that he did not wish to be recognized.

Garrity, who was a great friend of Steve, winked understandingly, and at once addressed Luscom, who had been impatiently waiting his arrival.

"What's the trouble here?"

"Ain't sure that there is any," rejoined Luscom, shortly; "but the bottom of this trunk is covered with blood, so I sent for the police."

"Quite right! Here, one of you men, pull off that rope."

"I'll do it, sir."

"Don't cut it! Here, wait a bit till I examine that knot."

"It's a half-hitch!" cried Luscom. "And this here, where the line's made fast, is a flat fishhook knot. Looks like the thing was tied up by a sailor."

"That was my idea," nodded Garrity. "Now loose it."

It took but a few minutes to cast off the line.

Then Garrity snapped the hasps of the trunk and threw back the cover.

The first thing to meet the gaze of the group of anxious observers, was an old oil-cloth, which had been doubled up and laid over the contents of the trunk.

The detective seized it by one corner and threw it out upon the ground.

As the interior of the trunk was disclosed a cry of amazement and dismay broke from the lips of all.

"By thunder! It's a case of murder!" cried Luscom.

"Nothing less than that!" muttered Garrity, ominously.

Beneath the oilcloth, crowded and doubled into the trunk, was the body of a man clad in a cheap gray suit now shockingly stained with blood.

But there was one feature which startled all the most, and brought an involuntary cry even from the detective, accustomed though he was to strange and terrible discoveries.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "The man's head is missing!"

"Isn't it in the trunk?" gasped Luscom, horrified by the sight.

"You may see for yourself."

"I've no wish to see more."

"Lay hold here, two of you men," cried Garrity; "and place the body upon the ground."

"Shure, I'll not lay a finger to it," protested one, shrinking back among his companions.

At this, and seeing the aversion with which the gang of men received the detective's command, Luscom turned toward the barge and bawled lustily:

"Here you, Madok, come ashore and lend a hand! Here is a fellow who will do the job for you, officer."

The man to whom Luscom had called stood gazing over the rail of the barge, from which he had been intently viewing the entire scene described.

On hearing the command, he cleared with a single broad leap the span from the barge to the landing, a distance of fully ten feet and strode rapidly toward the group of men.

His appearance was startling. He was more than six feet tall, and as black as a negro, yet his features were not those of the African race. His hair was straight and quite long, his head and feet were bare, and he was clad only in trousers and a blue woolen shirt, the open front of which revealed the huge muscles of his broad black breast.

Though evidently a man of forty years or thereabouts, his step was quick and elastic, his brawny arms like those of a giant, and his powerful figure as erect as an arrow.

Even Garrity was startled by the man's striking aspect.

"Who is this fellow?" he demanded of Luscom in a low voice.

"He is a Malay, and has been at work for me on the barge for a month or more," replied Luscom, as the man approached.

"He should be able to earn his pay."

"Yes; and he is as powerful as he looks," nodded Luscom. "Lay hold of that body, Madok, and place it upon the ground."

Luscom also indicated with gestures the nature of his command, much as if the other

was not familiar with the English tongue; and the Malay, with absolute indifference to the ghastly object in the trunk, instantly stooped and raised the decapitated body and laid it upon the ground nearby.

Despite that the victim of the tragedy was of considerable size, the Malay accomplished the feat with such apparent ease that Garrity again stared at his Herculean figure and wondered at the fellow's mighty strength.

The moment the body was removed one of the workmen cried, excitedly:

"Sure, officer, I know this man. Look at the foot on him."

Steve Manley wormed his way through the crowd and stared down at the member at which the speaker was pointing.

There was rather the absence of the extremity mentioned. Instead of having a foot, the left leg of the dead man had been amputated below the knee, and only a round wooden peg about two inches in diameter protruded from the bottom of the dead man's trousers.

"Who is the man?" Garrity instantly demanded.

"I dunno his name, sir, but I've seen him stumping about the landings along the river here for many a day."

"Do you know where he lived?"

"I think he lived up in Leary's place."

"Leary's boarding-house?"

"Shure, sir; that's the one I mean," nodded the informant. "I've seen him sitting outside the door up there many a time."

"Go up there at once and bring Leary down here," commanded the detective. "Tell him that Garrity, of the police department, wants him."

"D'y'e think that'll bring him, sir?"

"I don't think; I know it will."

As the man started off to obey, Garrity turned and beckoned Steve to his side and said, softly:

"What have you discovered?"

"I'm not on to anything yet, sir," replied Steve, in a whisper.

"Yet you did not want me to recognize you."

"What would have been the good of it? I might tumble to something, and 'twould be just as well if no one was on."

"What were you doing down in this locality?"

"I was piping off a junk man for the chief, who suspected him of swiping lead pipe," explained Steve. "When I saw the gang around the trunk, I chased meself down here to see what was up."

"Do you know if they have a telephone over in the office yonder?"

"Sure, they have."

"Slip up there, then, and telephone to the chief. He was not in the office when I came away, but should have arrived by this time. Tell him what has occurred, and ask him to come down here."

"Der case has a wicked look, d'y'e think?"

"Very," nodded Garrity. "And the chief will want to investigate it in person. I'll look after things here while you go and inform him."

Steve winked understandingly, and hastened up the landing toward the storage-house office, leaving the group of men still surrounding the grawsome discovery made that early morning, the least affected and most imposing of whom was the savage-looking Malay, whose grim and uncouth figure towered like that of a giant over those near him.

CHAPTER II.

THE IRISHMAN'S STORY.

"Tip the trunk up on end. I wish to see the bottom of it."

This was the first command of Chief O'Mara, after he had arrived on the scene

and learned the few details imparted by Garrity.

One of the workmen hastened to obey, and the chief quickly ordered all others to stand back from the immediate scene of his investigation.

It was less than a half hour since the crime was discovered. The body of the man lay upon the ground, but now was covered with the piece of oilcloth, hiding the dismal remains from morbidly curious eyes.

The news of the startling crime had spread rapidly, and at the head of the landing a great crowd of people had collected; but three policemen now were stationed there and prevented them from coming nearer. Other than those already on the spot, only additional detectives and the local reporters were allowed to approach.

It took the chief but a few moments to make his examination of the trunk. It was one of the cheapest sort, made of wood and covered with sheet tin, painted green, and was very much worn and soiled.

"It is evidently a back number," he said, addressing the several detectives gathered near. "It looks as if it had been discarded, and had been lying out in some dump heap."

"The dirt on it may have been collected in bringing it here," suggested Garrity.

"Possibly," nodded the chief. "It is quite an important question, however, as it may indicate whether the crime was committed in a house or out of doors. Notice that there are several small cobwebs next to these slats which run across the bottom."

"As if the trunk had been standing unmoved on a floor for some time?"

"Precisely. Notice, also, on the back edge of the cover these marks of white."

"What do you make of those, sir?"

"The trunk evidently has stood next to a whitewashed wall," explained the chief. "And when the lid was lifted, the back edge

of it evidently scraped the wall in places, removing some of the lime. Note that for a clew. We must discover where the trunk came from."

"I have noted the fact, sir."

"What is that oilcloth?"

"It is an old enameled table cover."

"Wait a bit! Have you got a rule?"

"Here is one, sir!" cried Luscom, venturing to approach.

Chief O'Mara took it and passed it to Garrity, then waved the bargeman back from where he had come.

"Measure that bend in the edge of the cloth in both directions, Garrity," he commanded. "That will give us the size of the table on which it has been laid. Stand back, there, all of you people!" he added, sharply to the crowd. "When I have anything for your ears I'll tell you so."

Garrity quickly made the measurements desired, and noted them upon paper.

"We may be able to locate the table from which the cloth was removed, though there doubtless are many of the same size," added Chief O'Mara. "Still, if we can find such a table occupying a whitewashed room, the wall of which has been marred by the opening of a trunk, the combination of circumstances will be worth considering."

"I should say so, chief."

"Start off a half dozen detectives at once on this search," continued the chief, softly. "Instruct them to visit all the tenements and doubtful houses in this locality, and those round about Leary's place, where this fellow is said to have resided. Set Steve Manley upon the work along with the others. Let it be done at once, and without too much publicity."

Garrity immediately turned to the waiting detectives and gave them the instructions; and Steve, along with the others, hurriedly departed from the landing.

Meantime the chief turned his investigation in a new direction.

"When was this trunk brought here, Watson?" he demanded, addressing the manager of the landing and the storage-house adjoining, who had just come down from the office.

"I cannot tell you, Chief O'Mara," was the reply. "I know nothing about it."

"Who is the master of this barge?"

"I am, sir," said Luscom.

"When did you haul up here?"

"Yesterday morning."

"How many men have you aboard?"

"Three, sir; this Malay here, and two others."

"Were you about here all of yesterday?"

"Either myself or my men."

"Then some of you must know if the trunk was here yesterday."

"It was not," said Luscom, promptly. "I saw it for the first time this morning. It was not here at dark last night."

"Watson, is there a watchman here nights?"

"No, sir; we don't keep one. The gates yonder are closed at night."

"Who was aboard the barge during last night?"

"Only Madok, this man here," replied Luscom, pointing to the Malay.

Chief O'Mara turned quickly in his direction, and said sharply:

"What do you know about the trunk? Anything?"

The Malay looked a little doubtful for a moment, then drew up his huge figure and showed two glittering rows of white teeth with a grin.

"Me no tell!" he exclaimed, with a voice as deep and sonorous as distant thunder.

"You will not tell?" cried the chief, with a quick frown of displeasure.

"He means that he cannot tell, sir," inter-

posed Luscom, hastening to explain. "The nigger don't understand English very well."

"Ah, that's different!"

"I think you can make him understand what you want, however."

The chief tried again. Pointing to the trunk, he asked more slowly:

"Do you know when that was left here?"

The Malay grinned again, and now shook his head.

"Me no tell," he repeated. "Me sleep."

"He means he was asleep when it was left here," explained Luscom.

"Who was aboard the barge with him last night?"

"He was alone. The other two men were at the hotel with me."

"What time did you go to sleep?" demanded the chief, turning to the Malay.

The latter raised his brawny arm and pointed to the western sky.

"Moon there," he said, shortly.

"Ah, he means that the moon was setting!" exclaimed Chief O'Mara. "Then it must have been nearly two in the morning."

"Yes, two!" cried the Malay, quickly holding up two fingers. "Hear bells two."

"He means," interposed Luscom, "that he heard one of the church clocks strike two."

"I understand," nodded the chief. "Was the trunk then here?"

"No here then!"

"It must have been brought later than two o'clock, then, and after this fellow went to bed."

"It was here at four o'clock, sur, I'll swear to that!" cried one of the gang of men, who was within hearing of what had been said.

"Were you here at four?" demanded Chief O'Mara, turning in his direction.

"I was that, and me friend Ferguson here'll bear witness."

"What were you doing about here at that early hour?"

"Shure, we knew the barge was to be unloaded, and were rowed up from below in the skiff tied yonder, hoping to get a job by being here first."

"That's right!" cried the Malay, whose intensely black eyes had been flashing with restless interest between the several speakers. "Me see them settee on box when me get up!"

And he now pointed to the trunk, as meaning the box mentioned.

"We were waiting about here from four o'clock until six," added the laborer; "and then the gates yonder were opened and the bargemen came down."

"Evidently, then, the trunk was brought here between two and four this morning," said Chief O'Mara, turning to Garrity. "Call Leary this way, that I may learn what he knows about the victim of the affair."

In response to the detective's summons there advanced from among the crowd a short, red-faced Irishman, whose crafty gray eyes and expression of distrust rather belied the readiness with which he approached.

"Have you seen this body, Leary?" demanded Chief O'Mara, with a sharp scrutiny of the man's face.

For Tim Leary's place near River street bore about as tough a reputation as any in the city, and the fact that Leary knew anything at all about the man and the affair was quite enough to warrant suspicion.

"Yis, sur, I was afther seeing it before 'twas covered up," he replied, jerking out the words with some rapidity.

"Can you identify it?"

"Aisy, sur; by the fut that's missing."

"Who is the man?"

"His name's Hogan, sur."

"What do you know about him?"

"Civil a thing do I know about him, sur, save he came to me house to live more'n three months back."

"Of course you know where he came from?"

"Shure, sur, I don't," protested Leary, evidently not liking the chief's sharp tone. "I only know phat he was afther telling me."

"What was that?"

"'Twas as how he'd been master of a vessel phat wint to Chiny, where tay comes from, and to all the furren countrries on the bottom side o' the worruld. He said as how he was afther losing his fut on his last trip, and gave up going to say fur good and fur all."

"Was he a man of means?"

"Shure, sur, he niver told me phat he had. He paid his board ivery wake and that's all I was afther wanting."

"Did he pay you with a check or with cash?"

"With the reddy money, sur."

"Was he in the habit of receiving friends?"

"Phat came to me house to see him, do yer mean?"

"Yes."

"Civil a friend do I think he was afther having in all the worruld."

"Why so?"

"Shure, no wan iver came to see him, and he niver had no letthers, and he was as odd a stick as the bit o' timber he stumped round the house on, making as much noise as a man driving nails with a hammer."

"You mean that he was eccentric?"

"Bedad, I don't know if he had that disease or not."

"You said he was an odd stick."

"That's phat I said."

"Well, that means the same as eccentric," growled Chief O'Mara, impatiently. "Was he a drinking man?"

"In a mild way, sur."

"Did you ever see him drunk?"

"Only wance, sur."

"When was that?"

"Only a month back, sur."

"Do you know when he was last seen alive?"

"Shure, how wud I know!" cried Leary. "The last I seen of him, he was pegging off down the street yesterday morning, not fur from noon. He didn't come back to his dinner or supper, and the next I knew was when I saw him here with his knob gone."

"What was his first name?"

"Bin, sur. He was called Cap'n Bin Hogan."

"Captain Ben Hogan," echoed the chief, glancing again toward the dismal object on the ground. "Do you, Leary, know anything further about this affair?"

"No, sur, I don't!" cried Leary, again representing the chief's tone. "I'm afther telling you all I know about it."

Yet a vague, fleeting expression in the crafty gray eyes of the Irishman led Chief O'Mara to suspect that he was not telling the whole truth.

CHAPTER III.

STEVE'S SECRET MISSION.

At that moment the coroner arrived upon the scene, and Chief O'Mara waved Leary back among the crowd, ending his inquiries for the time being, and presently returning to his office at headquarters. Before noon, however, after the body had been removed to the morgue, the reports of the score of detectives set at work upon the case began to come in, and the investigation took a more definite shape.

Yet the mystery was as dark as ever.

From all that could then be learned, Captain Ben Hogan was a stranger in Pittsburg. He had taken a room at Leary's between three and four months before, where he lived quietly, almost like a recluse at times, and had made no intimate friends.

He was said to be a man of nearly sixty

years, and claimed to have been at various times the master of vessels in the merchant service between the States and the Orient.

This fact, which was afterwards substantiated, would have indicated that he was a man of some means; yet an examination of his effects in his room at Leary's revealed that he was without money, unless the motive for the crime had been that of robbery, and his property stolen.

There was no evidence of this except the fact that his trunk and bureau were in a state of great confusion; but, as this disorder was characteristic of the entire room and closet, as well as all of his belongings, it definitely signified nothing.

On the man's person was found only a key to the room, a small sum of money, and a cheap silver watch.

The glass crystal of the latter was broken, the fragments still remaining in the case, and the watch had stopped at precisely half-past twelve. Yet it still was partly wound, and it was plainly evident that the watch had been broken during the assault in which Hogan had been killed.

"This should establish the precise time when the crime was committed," said Chief O'Mara, when discussing the case with several of his detectives that afternoon. "The question is, where and by whom was it done? It seems impossible that the man could have been murdered in broad daylight and out of doors, without there having been some witness to the crime."

"He certainly was out of doors most of the morning," rejoined Detective Morrissey; "for I have traced his movements until nearly noon."

"Run the facts over once more."

"He left Leary's before eleven o'clock, sir, and was seen going down Second street. Half an hour later, or about half-past eleven, he was sitting on the landing next to Wat-

son's, watching the barges hauling up the stream."

"Was he alone?"

"Yes, sir," replied the detective. "Furthermore, I learned that it was quite a habit of his to sit about the water front by himself, watching the boats on the river. Yet he is said to have been a rather grim and silent old chap, and seldom had words with others. That is what was said of him at Leary's, also."

"Could you trace his movements after he left the landing this morning?"

"Not continuously, sir. When last noticed on the landing, it was close upon noon, and I can find no person who saw him leave. But about quarter-past twelve he was seen hurrying through K street, five blocks from Leary's, and that was the last seen of him, so far as I can learn."

"Was he walking in the direction of Leary's?"

"Yes, sir."

"And hurrying?"

"The party who saw him is a saloon-keeper, who was standing outside of his door when Hogan passed. He states that Hogan then was moving as fast as he could, with his game foot, and went around the corner of K street."

"Evidently bound home?"

"It would seem so, chief; and I can find no person that saw him after the saloon man."

"The fact that he was hurrying," said Chief O'Mara, decidedly, "indicates that he had some unusual incentive. It is not like a man, maimed as he was, to hurry without some serious occasion. Have all the tenements in that locality been visited?"

"Yes, sir, and the men still are engaged in a search for such a room and table as has been described. There has nothing come of it yet, sir."

Nor did anything come of it until several hours later.

The noon edition of the papers contained long stories of the affair, and before the day was gone the main features of the tragedy were generally known, and most of the city was in a ferment of excitement over the startling mystery.

If not for robbery, why had the man been murdered?

Where and by whom could the crime have been committed?

What had been the object in removing the body to Watson's landing?

And why had the victim's head been removed, when there was ample room in the trunk for it to have been left there?

These were the questions every man was asking his neighbor, yet to none of which a reasonable answer could be returned.

One of the last to report that afternoon at the office of the chief was young Steve Manley, and the moment he entered Chief O'Mara knew by his face that he had made some startling discovery.

"What is it, Steve?" he quickly demanded, signing for him to close the door.

Steve's shoes were covered with mud, and he looked tired and dragged, yet he replied with his usual enthusiasm.

"I've found a room like the one you're looking for, Chief O'Mara."

"Where is it located?" asked Chief O'Mara, with quick interest.

"Down in P street, sir, next street to the one Leary's place is on."

"In a tenement?"

"No, sir; it's in back of a drug store."

"Who runs the store?"

"An old duffer by the name of Wagstaff."

"I know of the man; he's a half-crazy old fellow, who lives alone."

"I guess that's right, sir, for I have been looking him up pretty sharp."

"What have you learned? Tell me just what you have been doing?"

Chief O'Mara knew that Steve's boyish methods were not at all conventional, yet the fact that his young detective instinct had resulted in many clever discoveries, led Chief O'Mara to give him considerable leeway.

"It was like this, Chief O'Mara," Steve eagerly explained. "I run on a guy who had seen the old man stumping through K street this morning."

"A saloon-keeper?"

"Yes, sir."

"I've heard about him. What did you do then?"

"I went piping off all the houses I could look into between there and Leary's."

"Searching for the room described?"

"Yes, sir," nodded Steve. "But I didn't get on to anything till I struck P street. Then I thought I'd go into the drug place and ask the old man if he'd seen anything of the one as was killed."

"What did he say?"

"I couldn't get into the shop, sir. The door was locked."

"Then I sneaked through the alley next to the place, and looked in the back window. It's a little room where the drug man lives by himself."

"Do you mean that that was the room you discovered?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are the walls whitewashed?"

"They were once, sir; but it's most worn off now," said Steve. "And on one side, just about the height of the trunk, there's a line worn where the white is all barked off the boards."

"As if a trunk had been standing against the wall?"

"That's the way it looks, sir."

"What else is there in the room?"

"There's a table about the same size as the oilcloth found in the trunk, and it's now got a new cloth, nearly like the old one."

Though Steve's disclosures were decidedly startling, Chief O'Mara was not one to betray excitement.

"You have done well," he said simply. "What else is there in the room?"

"Only a stove, sir, and some common pieces of furniture."

"Did you attempt to enter?"

"I tried the window and the back door, but they were locked."

"Could you see any further evidence that the crime was committed there?"

"None at all, sir."

"Had the floor been recently washed?"

"Judging from the looks, Chief O'Mara, I'd say it hadn't been washed for a year," laughed Steve. "And I don't think the man was killed there, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because, when I couldn't get in, I made it a point to find out where Wagstaff had gone."

"Did you learn?"

"Easy, sir. I asked a bit of a girl who lives near by, and she said he was back in the hills, looking for plants what he makes bitters of. She said he'd been away early every day for a week, and came home along about dark."

"Was he away on one of these expeditions yesterday?"

"That's what the girl said. Then I thought I'd best make sure it was so, and I found out which way he'd gone and started out after him."

"Did you find him?"

"Less'n an hour ago, sir," nodded Steve. "I met him coming over the Point bridge, with a big bag of weeds over his shoulder."

"He had been after herbs," said Chief O'Mara, gazing thoughtfully at the floor for several moments.

"Yes, sir; that's what the girl said he was after."

"Did she say he was absent all of yesterday?"

"Yes, sir, all day."

"And is that why you think he may not have committed the crime?"

"That's the way I looked at it, sir."

"Yet the man may have taken this very method to avert suspicion," said the chief, shortly. "Do you know where he is at present?"

"He was in his shop half an hour ago, sir."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir; he was sorting over the weeds he'd brought in, and had 'em dumped on the floor of the shop."

Chief O'Mara glanced out of the window. It was approaching evening and dusk was falling.

"Have you had your supper, Steve?" he presently turned and demanded.

Steve thought he saw a chance to get another important assignment, and though he had eaten nothing since noon, that became a secondary interest.

"I have had all I want, sir."

"Then I wish you to undertake a mission for me to-night."

"I'm ready, sir."

"You say this place is in the neighborhood of Leary's?"

"They're near back to back, sir."

"I want you to go down there, then, and watch this man Wagstaff and see what he does to-night. Keep yourself out of sight, and above all things, out of his clutches, and see if he has any communication with Leary's lodgers. Can you do this, do you think?"

"Dead easy, Chief O'Mara!" cried Steve, eagerly. "Sure, a job like that is a snap."

"Set about it, then, and report here in the morning."

CHAPTER IV.

STEVE MEETS WITH A MISHAP.

It was dark when Steve Manley arrived in P street, and approached the shop occupied by Wagstaff, the apothecary.

It was one of the most inferior localities in the neighborhood of the river.

The buildings and innumerable dwellings were wrecks of the past, with tenement-houses predominating, into which were crowded an army of impoverished people glad of any shelter whatsoever.

Numerous alleys abounded on every side.

The streets were thronged nightly with noisy collections of idle men and women, while squalid, half-dressed children screaming at play or at fighting, raced the neighborhood until midnight.

Two out of every three shops were rum shops, and for a half-dozen blocks in either direction a more degenerate and tumble-down district would have been hard to find in any city of the globe.

It was decidedly a locality in which such a crime as that committed might have been expected. Half the people who lived there either were criminals, or willing to be if the crime would show a profit; and their sympathies were much less with the police than the offender, whom nine out of ten would have helped to escape an officer.

Throughout this broad area was a labyrinth of dark passages, with gloomy courts and alleys, and innumerable back yards and tumble-down stables.

For a stranger to have ventured after dark into this hive of wretchedness and vice was like taking his life in his hands.

Yet old Zenas Wagstaff, the name upon a faded sign above his shop door, had occupied his present quarters for nearly forty years. Amid such surroundings, it is not strange that he should have developed into an ugly, crabbed and suspicious old man; for he had

been jeered at by ragged urchins, and made the butt of their vicious pranks, until his head fairly had been turned against them, and he hated a boy as the devil hates holy water.

It was through the dingy street window of this man's shop that Steve paused to gaze that evening, just as the city clocks were on the stroke of eight.

"I'm on time," he said to himself. "There's the old fossil, now."

The light in the narrow shop was dim, only that of a smoky oil lamp which hung over the counter.

On the shelves was an array of dusty bottles, in wrappers faded with age; while scattered still upon the floor, as if to dry, was fully a bushel of herbs and plants which the man had brought in an hour or two before.

At the back of the room was a narrow door, which led into the kitchen. Between the two rooms was a narrow stairway leading to a single chamber and loft on the floor above.

In the midst of his dismal surroundings, with his bowed figure hanging over the counter, stood Wagstaff himself.

He was reading a paper spread open before him, with his sallow hands resting on the counter on either side of the open sheet.

His thin features were pinched and drawn; his parchment-like skin wore a greenish pallor; the steel spectacles on his hooked nose were trembling visibly, as the man's head shook with suppressed excitement.

A more vivid picture of subdued fear, distress and agitation could not be imagined.

Steve guessed what the matter was with him.

"He's reading up the crime," he said to himself. "He's just on to it that the murder has been discovered. Holy smoke! he looks as if he'd seen the ghost of the man himself."

Wagstaff had suddenly thrown back his head, till the light fell full on his ghastly face.

Then he fiercely crushed and crumpled the paper he had been reading, and stood for a moment like one in a riot of wild conjectures, with his staring eyes fixed on the shelves opposite, and his tall figure shaken from head to foot.

"I guess the chief's hit the nail on the head," thought Steve. "A man don't look like that who's dead easy in his nut, for sure. Hello, what game is he up to now?"

Wagstaff had suddenly wheeled about and started for the back room. Steve's impulse was to steal around the building to the back window, yet he briefly hesitated.

The man went only as far as the door of the kitchen, into which he stood gazing for several moments, with his fingers wildly clutching his sparse gray hair.

"He's looking at the kitchen wall where the trunk scraped it," decided Steve, watching his every movement. "The newspaper has told him what we're looking for, and he——"

But Steve was suddenly obliged to dart out of sight.

Wagstaff had turned again, and was tottering violently toward the street door.

He locked it, however, instead of leaving the shop. Then he put out the lamp, though it was only eight in the evening, and left the place in darkness.

Steve ran back to the window, and saw his gaunt figure disappear into the lighted kitchen, closing the door after him.

"He's up to some game to fool us," thought Steve. "I must pipe that off for sure."

The gate of an alley through which he that morning had passed to reach the rear of the building was now closed and locked.

On the other side of the shop was an-

other, making in between the drug store and a tenement-house, too far gone in decay to be occupied.

The ground in this alley was strewn with rubbish, old tomato cans, empty bottles, and no end of such refuse.

Carefully picking his way, Steve crept through this dark passage and reached the open space back of the buildings.

It covered quite an area. There was the yard back of Wagstaff's place and the empty tenement-house. Just beyond these was an old stable, with a musty back shed. Next to this was an old shed and dump heap, which belonged to a junk shop which fronted on the next street.

At quite a little distance across this confusion of dirt-heaps, sheds and rubbish, for the place was as disordered as can be imagined, was the rear wall and yard of Leary's lodging-house, in the next street. Only a straggling, tumble-down fence separated this place from those adjoining, and the lighted windows and doors of Leary's were plainly visible.

On reaching this miserable locality Steve heard a sound which caused him to hug the building for concealment.

The back door of Wagstaff's kitchen was being unbolted, and the next moment the man emerged.

He carried a small lantern, which shook violently in his scrawny hand, and at once started off in the direction of the junk shop.

Steve crouched down and watched him.

For five minutes or more he prowled about back of the junk shop, vanishing once into the gloomy shed near by; and, at the end of that time, Steve saw him returning.

"I'd better take a sneak till he is under cover," he decided, and slipped back into the alley.

He waited only until Wagstaff had re-entered the house, then he crept around to the kitchen window.

It was without a curtain, and Wagstaff now was tacking a piece of dark cloth across the lower half of the frame. To look in, Steve would require something to stand upon.

Steve laid low and waited.

For five minutes he heard the man moving excitedly about in the kitchen, and then a curious, scraping noise began.

"I've got to see what he's doing," thought Steve. "Mebbe the old duffer's going to hang himself. Or mebbe he's up to some game to queer the case against him."

After briefly searching about in the darkness, Steve found an empty barrel which he had noticed that morning. This he brought and softly placed it under the kitchen window. Carefully mounting it, he then could look over the cloth and into the room.

The mystery of the noise was instantly explained.

Wagstaff was on his knees upon the floor, engaged in scraping from the side wall of the room every sign that a trunk once had stood near it.

"So that's the game, is it?" said Steve to himself. "He thinks no fly cop like me is on to the room yet, and he means to head 'em off. I guess the chief'll have a use ^{for} him in the morning, all right."

The last thought had barely crossed his mind, however, when the ticklish perch on which Steve was standing suddenly collapsed. Without the slightest warning the head of the barrel fell in, and the latter overturned at the same time on the uneven ground.

Before Steve fairly knew what had happened, or before he could have caught himself, he came down squarely on his back on the side of the barrel, smashing through the staves with a tremendous crash, and for a moment seeing more stars than the heavens above presented, which was not a few. He was badly stunned, and almost lost consciousness.

The noise of his fall was echoed by a half-smothered yell from within the house, followed by a furious rush of feet; and, before Steve could begin to clear himself from among the loose hoops and staves, the alarmed and excited old druggist issued like a madman from the back door of the house.

CHAPTER V.

WAGSTAFF GIVES STEVE A SURPRISE.

Evidently Wagstaff had suffered from similar intrusions, for he located Steve almost instantly, and pounced upon him like a terrier on a rat.

"You little devil!" he snarled, furiously, seizing Steve by the throat. "You were spying on me, were you?"

Steve had enough of his wits about him to know what had happened, though he could scarcely move from the shock.

"Lemme alone!" he cried, feebly, as he tried to resist the bony hands of the wiry old man. "Lemme alone, I say! If you don't, I'll——"

"If I do, you'll be the luckiest little scamp there is in Pittsburg!" Wagstaff furiously interrupted.

And with surprising strength, against which Steve, in his weakened condition, was quite unable to cope, the enraged old man snatched him out from among the hoops and staves, and carried him into the house and bolted the door.

"Lemme down!" cried Steve, who was quickly recovering, wiggling about in the old man's arms. "Lemme out of here! If you don't, I'll shoot the top of your head off!"

But Wagstaff caught the gleam of the weapon Steve had succeeded in pulling, and with a snarl like that of an angry wolf he snatched it out of the young detective's hand.

"You'll shoot me, will you?" he muttered, angrily. "I'll fix you so that you'll not shoot,

or do anything else. I'll teach you to prowl about here watching me."

And while thus giving vent to his anger and resentment, he threw Steve face down upon the floor, and quickly bound his hands behind his back.

"You'll shoot, will you?" he snarled, catching him up again and standing him on his feet. "You'll more likely get shot, you little mongrel."

"Say, old man!" cried Steve, gasping defiantly, quite himself again; "you want to handle me kinder easy. You might break me. What do you think I'm made of, injur rubber?"

"What were you doing out there?"

"I wasn't doing anything."

"You're lying. You were looking through my window!"

"Well, what if I was? That didn't hurt der window, did it? I wanted ter see was yer ter home."

"What did you want of me?"

"I wanted ter buy some parrigoric. Me little baby brother has der cramps in his stummick, and me muther sent me ter get it."

"You're lying!"

"Does I look like a feller as would lie about a baby what's dying with der cramps? I'm giving it ter yer straight. When I found der shop door locked——"

"You didn't try the shop door," cried Wagstaff, glaring fiercely down at Steve's defiant face. "I'd have heard you, if you had tried it."

"How could yer hear when yer was busy?" demanded Steve, cornered for a moment. "Yer was making such a noise with yer scraper you couldn't have heard me."

Wagstaff looked alarmed, and glanced sharply at the wall at which he had been at work.

Then the revolver he had laid on the table caught his eye, and gave him an idea.

Taking the lamp, he held it down to study Steve's face more closely, at the same time demanding, harshly:

"What's your name?"

"Me name is Peters," said Steve, promptly. "I live down on der Point, and my father works in der coal yards."

But the wrath pictured in Wagstaff's face already had given place to suspicion.

"You're lying again!" he cried, sharply. "Your name is not Peters!"

"How der yer know so much? You weren't der guy that christened me."

"How came you by this revolver?"

"I keep it ter kill rats with. Der house where I live is full of 'em."

"Stop your lying!" Wagstaff now cried, replacing the lamp on the table. "Your name is not Peters. You are that boy I have read of as being connected with the police. I know your face, now. I saw it in one of the papers."

"You're wrong!" cried Steve. "That was my twin brother."

"No, I'm not wrong," snarled Wagstaff. "And I know why you were prowling about here and spying upon me. You're at work for the police."

Steve saw there was no use in longer putting up a bluff, so he met the situation flat-footed.

"Since you're wise to it all, then, what are you going to do about it?" he demanded.

Before replying, Wagstaff forcibly thrust Steve into a chair, then tightly closed the door leading to the shop.

His rage appeared to have abated on discovering Steve's identity, but the expression on his sallow face and in his glittering eyes was not encouraging.

Dropping into a chair fronting Steve, for the old man's knees were shaking tremulously, he said, sharply:

"I don't know, yet, what I'll do about it.

You have no business here. You were spying upon me to see what you could learn about that murder. I've read what the papers say about it, and you've seen too much to-night for your own good."

"Well, I ain't alone in the mess," returned Steve, significantly.

"You're alone in knowing what I was doing," snarled Wagstaff. "Why shouldn't I put you out of the way, and then go on with my work. Who'd be the wiser? I have drugs in my shop which would end you in a second."

"Take the quickest, old man, if you really mean to do it," said Steve. "I wouldn't like to linger long on the trip."

A curious grin, half-malicious, half-approving, parted Wagstaff's gray lips and revealed the few teeth he had left in either jaw.

"Well, I'm not going to do it!" he said, curtly. "Instead, I am going to set you free. Here, take your ugly little toy and put it back in your pocket. You may need it against a worse man than I am."

As he spoke, he reached back of Steve and loosed his hands, then passed him the revolver lying on the table.

All this rather took Steve by surprise.

"Say, old man, you're not so bad, after all," said Steve, curiously regarding him. "D'y mean I'm free to go out, if I like?"

"You may go when you please," nodded Wagstaff, soberly. "But I'd like to tell you something first."

"About the murder?"

"About what the papers say of it, boy; not about the murder," said Wagstaff, quickly. "I know nothing about the murder itself."

"I'm blessed if I don't more'n half believe you," said Steve, quickly. "But what was you scraping the wall for?"

Wagstaff glanced again at the collection

of lime sprinkled over the floor near by, but the look in his sunken eyes was no longer that of fear.

"I'll tell you why I was scraping it," he said, grimly. "I have been away all day, and I heard of the murder only when I returned. I didn't think much about it then, and not until I read my evening paper did I discover in what way I was involved."

"You mean you read about the trunk?"

"Yes," nodded Wagstaff. "And about the oilcloth, and the fact that the detectives were looking for the room they came from. All the evidence is reported in the paper."

"Then you had nothing to do with the job?"

"No more than yourself."

"But what was you scared of?"

"Because the old trunk and tablecloth were mine, and I lately had them in this room."

"Were they here yesterday?"

"No, I threw them away the day before. You see, I've a new cloth on the table, and the old trunk was falling to pieces and took up too much room. So I threw them out on the dump-heap back of the junk shop."

"If that's the case, why was you scraping the wall?" demanded Steve.

"Because I was not sure that any person could testify to having seen me throw the trunk away!" cried Wagstaff, quite excitedly. "Nor can I prove that I was not here when the crime was committed. I was away gathering herbs; but I was alone."

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone. How could I prove an alibi? Suppose the police were to claim that I returned here and killed the man? How could I prove that I did not, and that the old trunk and tablecloth were not here in this room when the deed was done?"

"Oh, I'm getting wise to your game, now!" exclaimed Steve. "You started in to fix the wall so that you'd not be suspected."

"Precisely. That was my first impulse when the fear seized me. I just went out back to make sure the trunk was gone, and when I failed to find it I knew that I might possibly be suspected. I did not suppose that this room already had been located."

"I was on to it this noon," said Steve, somehow feeling that the old man was telling the truth. "But what made you change your mind and release me?"

"Because I recognized you, and knew you were serving the police."

"You're dead right in that."

"And what use to lie in that case?" cried Wagstaff, with some feeling. "When a man is in a desperate situation, he had better tell the whole truth. If I already am suspected, it would be madness for me to conceal the true facts."

"I say, sir," cried Steve, suddenly thrusting out his boy's hand; "put it there! I believe you're giving it to me dead straight."

Wagstaff smiled faintly on seeing that he had won Steve's favorable opinion, and gravely shook his hand.

"Your belief may be worth something to me," he said, in troubled tones; "if you'll do what I ask."

"What's that?" demanded Steve.

"That you look into the case along with me, till we see what we can make of it."

"I'll do that," said Steve, readily. "I've got the whole night before me, for I'm down here just to watch you."

"You need have no trouble in doing that, for I'll keep you here until morning, if you say so," grinned Wagstaff. "Wait till I get the paper containing a report of the evidence, and we'll see what we can make of the case."

"All right, sir," said Steve. "And if we can run down the right game—say, old man! Keep still for a second!"

Steve had suddenly sprang up and caught him by the arm, as he was about starting for the shop.

For a moment both stood listening intently. "What did you hear?" Wagstaff at length muttered.

"There's some one out back there," whispered Steve. "Wait a bit, till we see what his game is."

They had only a moment to wait.

Approaching footsteps were heard, and then a sharp knock sounded on Wagstaff's back door.

The old man looked surprised and perplexed, much as if a visitor was very unusual; but Steve cried, softly:

"See who 'tis! But don't give it away that I am in here. I'll lay low in the shop. Mebbe we'll strike a clew."

Wagstaff caught the idea, and nodded his approval; and Steve slipped silently into the gloomy shop, and partly closed the door.

CHAPTER VI.

LEARY SHOWS HIS HAND.

With a look of serious misgiving on his sallow face, Wagstaff went and opened the back door.

A man standing in the gloom outside at once said quickly:

"The top o' the evening to yer, Misther Wagstaff! So I'm afther finding yez to home?"

The man was the red-headed little Irishman whom Chief O'Mara had suspected of concealing at least a part of the truth.

It was Mr. Tim Leary.

He had come across from his back door to that of Zenas Wagstaff, at whom he now stood grinning over the threshold.

"What do you want?" demanded Wagstaff, who had even less love for this neighbor than any of those around him.

"Shure, seeing the light in your windy, I thought I'd run over to pass a bit of talk. Have yez heard of the murdher?"

"Yes, I have heard of it," Wagstaff coldly

answered, drawing back a step or two. "You may come in, if you wish."

"It's a bad piece of work," grinned Leary, as he entered and took a chair.

"Bad, indeed!"

"I don't 'spose you was afther knowing the old cap'n?"

"No, I did not know him."

"He was a foine bit o' a man, and it's a sad ind he's made."

There was a cold glitter in the eyes which Wagstaff fixed upon his visitor, when he sat down in a chair opposite to him.

He suspected that the Irishman had called with some evil design, but he could by no means guess what.

Yet he knew that Steve was watching the scene from behind the shop door.

"Was he a drinking man?" Wagstaff asked, for want of a better question.

Leary tossed his ugly red head and laughed.

Then he made the same answer he had made Chief O'Mara.

"He was afther taking a drop now and thin, but I niver saw him good and dhrunk but wance."

"Once?"

"Yis, wance," nodded Leary.

"When was that?"

"Bedad, 'twas afther a fright he tuk."

"A fright?"

"Yis, and a fit."

"A fright and a fit? What caused them?"

"Shure, he was afther seeing a big black nagur come into me barroom, wan day whin he was sated with a drink before him," Leary explained.

"A negro?"

"Yis, a nagur. He was death on nagurs, he was. He hated a nagur. And this wan I spake of came in suddin-loike, and whin the old cap'n seen him he gave a bit of a yell and fell stiff as a stick on the flure, wid only

the white balls of his eyes a-showing, and a froth on his two lips loike that on a glass av bock."

"Do you say he was in a fit?" demanded Wagstaff.

"Shure, 'twas a fit! And whin he came out av it, he loaded himself up wid rum till he was dhrunk as a goat, and for three days he didn't lave his bid. That's the wance I seen him dhrunk."

"Did he know the negro who startled him so?"

"Niver a bit of it," said Leary. "But he was death on all nagurs, he was."

Wagstaff made no response.

A moment of silence followed.

Leary's crafty eyes briefly left the old man's face, wandered toward the wall and the sprinkling of lime on the floor beneath, and then reverted to those of his observer.

Wagstaff was a shrewd and discerning old man, and he saw that Leary had on his mind some evil project, which he was a little cautious about approaching.

It was several moments before the crafty little Irishman led up to it.

"Is your business afther being pretty good, Mishter Wagstaff?" he finally inquired.

Wagstaff frowned grimly, yet gave him line enough to discover what he was after.

"It's good enough," he rejoined. "It's never too good."

"But you've been here in this old shop for many a day, Mishter Wagstaff."

"For nearly forty years."

"Is that so?" cried Leary, with a great display of interest. "That is afther being a long time. Shure, a man oughter lay by a good bit o' money in forty years. Is it pretty well off yez are?"

"I have enough for my needs."

"Yis, and a good bit besides, I'll bet," said Leary, significantly.

"Well, suppose that I have!" cried Wagstaff, bluntly. "What's that to you?"

"D'yé think it's anything to me?" grinned the Irishman.

"I think you are here with some object," Wagstaff sharply rejoined; "and you may as well out with it. Why do you ask these questions?"

Leary now did not like his tone.

"Because I've an offer to make ye, the which you'd better be afther accepting, or the worse'll be yours," he rejoined, with a resentful scowl settling on his crafty, red face.

"What offer have you to make me?"

"Shure, you're afther knowing the scrape you're in, and ye can't deny that?"

"I am in no scrape."

"It's aisy to say it, me man; but the worruik you've been afther doing here on the wall gives it the lie."

It would be impossible to describe the expression which had risen to Wagstaff's grim and wrinkled face, from which his angry eyes were glowing like sunken balls of fire; yet he held in check his rising passion until he could learn at precisely what this vicious little fellow was aiming.

Without a glance toward the wall at which Leary was pointing, he snarled harshly:

"Gives what the lie? What do you mean, Tim Leary?"

"Shure, you're afther knowing 'twas your trunk that Hogan's did body was found in, Mishter Wagstaff; and you've been afther doing this job here on the wall to throw the cops off the scint."

"Did you come here to tell me that?"

"Bedad, I did not!" exclaimed Leary. "That spakes for itself. I came here to tell ye how I could save you, if you'd make it worth me while."

"Do you mean that you can save me from suspicion and arrest?"

"Shure, that's jist phat I mane."

"And you want me to pay you for such a service?"

"Phat the devil else wud I be here for?"

"Are you sure you can do what you say?"

"Faith, I am that!"

"In what way?"

"By showing that the trunk wasn't here in yer house whin Hogan was kilt."

"Then you saw me throw it out on the dump heap the night before, did you?" demanded Wagstaff, eagerly.

"I did, sur; and I'm the only wan that did! I was looking out av me back wind'y at the time!" cried Leary, with an emphatic shaking of his ugly little head; "and I held me pace whin the cop asked me about it, thinking I——"

"Thinking you could thus get the best of me, and force me to buy from you the testimony that would save me from suspic'on!" interrupted Wagstaff, with an ominous shake in his voice.

"That's phat I did!" admitted Leary, with a crafty grin.

"And you knew that the trunk was mine?"

"Faith, why wud'nt I know it?"

"Yet you withheld this evidence from the police?"

"Shure, I did! Phat could I make by tell-ing 'em?"

"Do you think that I will pay you for makin' the truth known?"

"Shure, that's for you to say," grinned Leary, with a wave of his hand. "If ye're afther thinking more of yer money than yez do of yer life, yer can kape the money and I'll kape me secret."

"Will you allow me to be arrested, when a word from you might serve to prevent it?"

"What's that to me?"

"Evidently nothing!"

"Shure, it's nothing! You're no friend of mine."

"And if I refuse to make terms with you?"

"Thin you'll have to take phat the cops give you."

"You will betray me?"

"That's phat I will!" cried Leary, nodding. "I'll tell 'em the trunk was yours, and lave you to show it wasn't here whin the man was kilt. Shure, and the case'll be strong enough agin ye widout my telling 'em more."

And the designing little scoundrel pointed significantly at the wall upon which Wagstaff plainly had been at work.

The old man rose to his feet.

"If I agree to pay you for this service," he answered, grimly, "will you state to the police that the trunk was out on yonder dump heap yesterday morning, several hours before the crime was committed, and not here in my house?"

"Shure, I will!" cried Leary, eagerly springing up. "And that's the best ye can do! A worud from me'll save ye no ind of throuble. Faith, man, mebbe 'twill save yer life. Now, what d'ye say? If ye'll be afther doing what's right by me——"

"I'm going to do what's right by you!" interrupted Wagstaff, with a very curious ring suddenly sounding in his voice.

"Yez are?"

"I am!"

And he did.

Before Leary could make a move to prevent it, the furious old man, who in reality was as strong and tough as an old hemlock, seized the little Irishman bodily and slammed him fiercely down upon the floor.

Once, twice and thrice he picked him up and repeated this action, all the while snarling furiously and fairly drowning Leary's dismayed and frightened yells; and, finally, when his own breath was nearly gone, he opened the kitchen door and kicked him out of the house and half across the yard, until Leary succeeded in gaining his feet and fleeing as if for life itself.

Then Wagstaff strode back into the house and closed the door.

CHAPTER VII.

SIZING UP THE CASE.

As Wagstaff entered by one door, Steve Manley emerged by the other.

The young detective's face was aglow with satisfaction and triumph.

"That settles it. All right, Mr. Wagstaff!" he cried, joyously; "and you're a peach! It shows where the trunk was when the man was killed, and it's dead lucky I was here to overhear his nib's little game."

"So it is!" exclaimed Wagstaff, clapping Steve on the shoulder. "I knew you were listening, so I let the ugly little cur betray himself to the limit. He has done me a service without intending it."

"Sure, he has," cried Steve; "and in return you didn't do a thing to him."

Wagstaff laughed at the boy's tone of approval.

"I gave him what he deserved," he rejoined.

"And you did it to the queen's taste! It's odds he takes his dinner standing to-morrow. Der chief was on to him in some way, but he didn't know just what the little Turk's game was. So I was here to pipe off the both of you."

"Perhaps the chief thought Leary and I did the job together, in order to rob the old captain."

"I wouldn't wonder if he thought 'twas done by some of Leary's gang. Der old man's money was all gone when Garrity made der investigation in his room."

"But the papers say that Leary showed how he was employed all of yesterday, hence he could not have committed the murder."

"But mebbe der ugly guy went through Hogan's room after he heard he was dead," suggested Steve.

"When did he learn of the fact?"

"When Garrity sent up word for him to come down to der landing. Then he may have waited to swipe what money the cap'n had in his room."

"That is more likely the case!" exclaimed Wagstaff, quickly appreciating Steve's cleverness. "And, in addition to that, he aimed to rob me in his rascally way."

"But we've got the best of him now!" cried Steve.

"That we have!"

"And it looks like the man was killed out back here."

"So it does."

"He was seen coming this way, you know, just a short time before the crime was pulled off."

"So the paper states."

"Oh, I'm on to all that's in the papers. He was down near Watson's landing 'bout twelve o'clock."

"Isn't he said to have been hurrying home?"

"Sure he was!"

"Is it known why he was in a hurry?" demanded Wagstaff.

"There don't seem to be any way of explaining that," said Steve, doubtfully.

"Yet, if he was really in a hurry, he may have come through P street and taken a short cut through the alley out here, in order to reach Leary's back door."

"There'd oughter be a way of settling that!" cried Steve, suddenly.

"How so?"

"Der ground is soft out there."

"That's so."

"And if Hogan went through the alley and across the yards, the peg he had for a foot oughter made holes in the ground, showing which way he went."

"Good for you, my boy!" exclaimed Wagstaff, with much approval. "We'll examine the ground in the morning."

"What's the use of waiting till morning?" demanded Steve. "Strike while the iron's hot."

"But it's dark out there."

"You've got a lantern. Light her up, and we'll get down to the case at once."

"Good!" cried Wagstaff, hastening to bring the lantern from a closet. "I should have thought of this myself, for I have lately been using it."

Steve did not tell him that he had been watching him all the while.

It took but a moment to light the lantern, and the two men then left the house by the back door, and repaired to the alley in which Steve lately had been hiding.

Holding the light close to the ground, they began their search.

It was not long before Steve's sharp eyes made the anticipated discovery.

"Here you are!" he suddenly cried. "Here's a hole just the size of the peg."

Wagstaff examined it carefully.

"You are right, I guess," he said, presently.

"The hole was made by something round," cried Steve, "and evidently with lots of weight. And this edge shows that he was moving in this direction, if we are right, for it shows where the peg had dragged a little when he made the step. Now to look for another a few feet that way."

"Here it is," cried Wagstaff, suddenly.

"And precisely like the other!" exclaimed Steve. "There's no doubt about it; we are right. Look for the next step."

It was found almost within a minute, and Steve then measured the space between them.

"What's that for?" demanded Wagstaff.

"By the length of the strides we can tell about how fast the man was going!" explained Steve. "Yes, this is a cinch. He was hurrying at the top of his speed. Follow the tracks till we see where they end."

This required longer.

For a quarter-hour they continued their careful search, locating one indentation after the other, and thus establishing the course taken by Captain Ben Hogan the day before, when he hastened through the alley and across the deserted back yards.

At the end of that quarter hour Steve and Wagstaff found themselves standing on the dump heap of the junk shop, and nearly under the adjoining shed.

From where they stood, the gate entering into the yard back of Leary's lodging-house was but a little distance to the left.

It was very plain that the old sea captain, perhaps hurrying for life, had left P street and made a short cut through the alley described, and then aimed to reach Leary's back door.

Had he been killed there on the dump heap, or within the shed close by, and his body then packed in the trunk which old Zenas Wagstaff had thrown out of his house only the night before? If so, by whom?

"Look here!" suddenly exclaimed Wagstaff, who still was busily searching about with the lantern.

"What have you found?"

"Here are signs of a fight. The ground is all scraped up, and here's more of the holes, all within a few feet of each other."

These were under the shed, and in a location which, even at midday, might have been free from observation.

"It looks very much as if the man had been killed on this very spot," said Steve, after making as careful an examination of the ground as the light from the lantern allowed. "And, say, he put up an ugly fight for at least a few moments."

"It could have been done here in the shed," said the apothecary, stopping for a moment to look up. "No one would have seen it come off under here."

"That's correct. And most likely the as-

sassin then hid the body in the trunk. It stood right there. That's what he did, right enough!" Steve continued; "and then he sneaked up here after dark and took the whole business away."

"He must have had help in doing that."

"Mebbe so. But what could he have wanted of the old man's head?"

"That is a hard question to answer," replied Wagstaff, "since Hogan's wooden leg was sufficient to identify him, even if his head was gone."

"I'll be hanged if that part of the job don't puzzle me," rejoined Steve, dubiously.

"Let's go back to the house, and we will try and fathom the mystery," said Wagstaff, now starting off across the gloomy yards.

Steve followed with the lantern.

Although he now felt quite sure that Captain Ben Hogan had been murdered out there on the dump heap, the solution of the mystery still seemed as far away as ever.

"It don't seem as if Leary or any of his gang would have killed the man out there," he observed, as Wagstaff locked the door after them.

"And why would they have taken the man's head, and then lugged the body down to the landing and left it there," answered Wagstaff.

The detective looked at the old man, and then he exclaimed, excitedly:

"I don't think that Leary did it."

"You don't?"

"No, I don't. Neither Leary nor any of his gang would have had the nerve to kill a man out there in broad daylight. They would have selected a different time and place if they wanted to get rid of him."

"I guess you're right," the old man observed, with an admiring glance at Steve.

"The deed was done by some person a good deal more determined and desperate than any of the Leary gang," continued

Steve. "Besides, the evidence we have just discovered looks to me as if it pointed to some party we haven't suspected, and perhaps don't know anything about."

"How do you make that out?" inquired the old man, opening his eyes.

"Little things have lots of significance in a case of this kind," Steve replied, as he rose to get the newspaper from the other room. Returning, he took a chair opposite Wagstaff.

"Read it out loud," said the latter. "Maybe I'll get an idea, too."

The young man complied, and nearly an hour was spent in reading the long story of the crime, as given in the latest edition of the local paper.

When Steve finally laid down the printed sheet the clock on the kitchen shelf was striking ten.

"Now, what do you make of it?" demanded the old man, who had been watching with interest the detective's changing face.

"Much!" Steve replied. "Both much and nothing!"

"How can that be?"

"I mean that there are some mighty queer circumstances, even if there is no definite clew to the wily assassin."

"Not even myself," laughed Wagstaff.

"No, not even yourself," replied Steve. "There's where the cops have been dead asleep; but I guess the laugh's on me, too, because I thought I was on the track, when I was chasing the oilcloth and trunk. There's another clew we ought to have been chasing all the time, and that's no joke. There's another man in the pie, I'm thinking."

"What man is that?"

"The man who was murdered."

"What about him?"

"Well, to begin with," said Steve, "Hogan was a seaman, and he recently retired because he lost his foot, didn't he?"

"That's true for a starter," nodded Wagstaff.

"He has been leading an idle life at Leary's for more than three months, and had money to pay his way with. So, now, yesterday, as usual, he left his room and walked down to the river, where he sat watching the boats. There's always a string of the old guys down there."

"That's very true," said Wagstaff, attentively, wondering what Steve was driving at.

"Up to the time he reached the river," continued Steve, "he appeared as usual, for the paper says he sat smoking on the landing near Watson's until almost noon."

"Yes, my boy, that's so."

"The next seen of him he was hurrying for dear life through P street, and we two now know that he lit out through the alley out here and went up against something on the dump heap or under the shed. Do you see?"

The old man looked at him for a moment, with his brow wrinkled, but he could see nothing strange in Steve's recital.

Then Steve suddenly sprung from his chair.

"The old man was frightened by some one down by the river!" he cried, quickly.

"Do you think so?" exclaimed Wagstaff, his eyes brightening.

"Sure thing," said Steve. "Nobody saw him leave the landing, and he probably stole away on the sly, because the old duffer may have thought he might be seen and chased."

"Then he probably was pursued!" cried the old man. "And that's why he was hurrying."

"You're on to the idea. If that's the game, then we fly cops better look along the river front for the man who killed him. And say!" added Steve, "I heard one of the men on the landing say the rope around the trunk was tied with a knot like sailors make."

"All the more evidence that you are right,"

nodded Wagstaff. "Hogan probably saw some person round about there, of whom he had reason to be afraid, and that is the person the police must discover."

"I'll tell the chief about this the first thing in the morning. And there's one thing more, Mr. Wagstaff."

"What's that, my boy?"

"You heard what Leary said here tonight?"

"Yes."

"He told of a time when Hogan had a fit, and then was dead loaded for days."

"I remember his saying that."

"And just because Hogan had seen a nigger all of a sudden come into Leary's joint," continued Steve. "Do you see the layout? Hogan is dead scared of some nigger, and the fellow that made him do a song and dance yesterday morning most likely was—"

"A negro."

"That's the ticket. A nigger!"

Steve gave vent to the exclamation with an excitement scarce to be described, and again leaped up from his chair.

"I'm on to it now!" he cried, wildly. "I'm dead on to it now!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Wagstaff, with startled interest.

"There was a big nigger on the barge down at Watson's landing!" cried Steve. "I saw him there just after they found the trunk. Hully gee, and he was a corker!"

"Was the barge hauled up there yesterday morning?"

"That's what they said."

"Then this negro may have just arrived. Did he show any interest in the trunk, or in the doings of the police?"

"I saw him watching 'em from the barge."

"Was he employed on the barge?"

"So the man said who runs it."

"Did he say anything more?"

"What about?"

"About the negro?"

"He said he was a Malay, who came from one of the islands——"

"Not from Borneo?" interrupted Wagstaff, with a sudden outbreak of excitement.

"Yes, that's just the place he said!" cried Steve. "He said he was a native of—what did you call it?"

"A native of Borneo."

"Those were the very words, sir."

"And those words solve the whole mystery," Wagstaff now cried, deeply. "That native was the man who killed Hogan, and he now has the old seaman's head. This Malay, beyond any doubt, is a head hunter."

"A head hunter?" gasped Steve, with eyes dilating. "What the dickens is a head hunter?"

"I'll tell you," Wagstaff said, quickly. "Borneo is a large island near China, and the natives are of the Malay race, and are called Dyaks."

"What's that?" Steve quickly interposed. "Did you say they were called dagoes?"

"No, not dagoes," grinned Wagstaff. "They are called Dyaks. They are a wild and treacherous people, and are very superstitious and cruel. Not only are they cannibals, but they have also among their frightful customs the practice of cutting off the head of an enemy, when the enemy can be found and killed. It is a part of their vengeful religion, and these severed heads are often given in payment for a slave, or even for a wife."

"And you think this man on the barge is one of the head hunters?" asked Steve.

"I now have no doubt of it," said Wagstaff, with considerable assurance.

"Hogan probably has visited Borneo on one of his voyages, and very possibly committed some outrage offending this native Dyak, who doubtless threatened to be avenged, and who since had followed Hogan even to this country. It is a hundred to one

that they saw each other before Hogan left the landing, and that the native pursued and overtook him, and killed him under yonder shed before Hogan could regain sufficient strength and breath to give an alarm."

"And that explains why the head is gone," said Steve.

"Precisely!" cried Wagstaff. "The native, according to his custom, aims to take the head back to Borneo with him as evidence that the wrong or outrage, if such there was, had been avenged."

"I must go up to the office," said Steve, seizing his cap from the table. "The head hunter must be arrested."

"Wait a while," commanded Wagstaff. "You must not be in a hurry."

"But I can't let the head hunter escape."

"He will not attempt to escape unless he thinks himself suspected."

"Mebbe that's so."

"He will remain on the barge till it is unloaded, surely," continued Wagstaff. "And since you have no positive proof of his guilt, that is the first thing you should seek to obtain, even before arresting the man himself."

"Do you mean the head of the old captain?" demanded Steve.

"Certainly that is what I mean. If you can discover what the Malay has done with it, and produce it as evidence against him, you will have the man dead to rights."

"That's the very thing!" cried Steve, again pulling off his cap and tossing it aside. "I'll not report yet. I'll lay low with you until morning, and then I'll go head hunting myself. Say, I'm glad yer gimme back the gun, for I'm like to need it against a man worse than you by the longest kind of odds."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEAD HUNTER.

With impatience born of his ambition to be foremost in securing the grawsome object which would serve to solve the mystery of

Captain Ben Hogan's death, Steve felt that he could not wait Chief O'Mara's arrival at the police headquarters the next morning, but that he must at once begin his search for the missing head, and at the same time fall to watching the Malay in order to prevent his escape.

The moment he had finished the early breakfast Wagstaff had provided, Steve made ready to depart.

"Where are you going so early?" demanded Wagstaff, with a rather anxious expression on his wrinkled face.

"Down to Watson's landing," replied Steve.

"For what?"

"To begin a still hunt for the cap'n's head."

"You don't intend going alone, do you?"

"Why not?"

"You will take a dangerous risk."

"That's part of the business."

"If this Dyak savage thinks himself suspected, or if he should suddenly find himself in a corner from which he could not escape, he would become a thousand times more reckless and desperate than any white man," Wagstaff remonstrated, in a way which indicated that he now entertained a very friendly feeling for this young detective.

"But I'm not going ter pull the man myself," rejoined Steve. "D'y'e take me for a jay? I ain't in his class in the scrapping business. He's the heaviest kind of a heavy."

But Wagstaff had no appreciation of Steve's boyish display of indifference.

"You had better take a posse of officers with you," he replied; "or, at least, have them within call."

"But I'm only going to make a hunt for Hogan's missing head, and see that the head hunter don't cut away and run," rejoined Steve, looking very much bored at thus being cautioned against the possible danger.

"Yet you must remember that such a savage as this Dyak sets no value on his own life, and much less on the lives of others, if that were possible," persisted Wagstaff. "The very fact that he could murder Hogan in broad daylight, and within a hundred feet of nearly as many people, shows how little he cares for himself and for our laws and penalties. I say again, you had better be careful."

"I'll look out for myself," returned Steve, confidently. "If you really think the odds are so strong against me, I'll tell you what you can do. At the same time you'll be doing me a favor."

"What is that?"

"Go up to headquarters when you can get the time, and, when Chief O'Mara comes in, tell him the whole business."

"That wouldn't hurt my case with him, would it?" said Wagstaff, rather approvingly.

"Sure, 'twouldn't!" cried Steve. "It would be more likely to square you with him. And you can tell him where I've gone, and he, then, can do what he thinks best about it."

"How soon will he be at his office?"

"Well, if the lady of the house has his breakfast ready when he comes down to eat it, he'd oughter get round to the office in just about an hour," grinned Steve.

"I will go up there about that time and see him," said Wagstaff, shortly.

"And tell him that Steve Manley is on a still hunt down to the barge," said Steve, pulling on his cap and opening the back door.

"Is that your name?" demanded Wagstaff, detaining him briefly by the shoulder.

"Yes, sir; and that's on the level this time," Steve laughed, significantly, looking at him.

"It is not Peters, then?"

"No, sir; that was a gag. I'm giving it to you dead straight now, sir. You ask the

chief, and he'll tell you all about me. Now, sir, I'm off after this head hunter."

"Good-by, then."

"So long!"

Wagstaff smiled faintly, but the same anxious concern for Steve's safety lingered still in his aged eyes.

He did not waste much time before setting forth on the mission he had accepted. Before Steve fairly had turned the corner of P street Wagstaff emerged from his shop door and started for the police headquarters.

It was not quite seven o'clock when Steve arrived at Watson's landing.

Seven was the hour when the men were expected to go to work.

The barge was still there, and evidently was not wholly discharged of her freight.

On some of the numerous boxes and cases which now occupied the landing a number of the laborers were seated, smoking and talking.

As he approached, Steve observed two of the boatmen on the deck of the barge, but he saw nothing either of Luscom or of the formidable Malay.

Walking down to the boat, Steve boldly went aboard of her and accosted one of the hands.

"Where'll I find Mr. Luscom?" he inquired.

"He's not down here yet," rejoined the boatman, indifferently. "He is at the hotel."

"Ain't he coming down?"

"I reckon he'll be down in the course of an hour or so."

"I s'pose I can wait here till he comes, can't I?" asked Steve.

"I guess so. There's no law against it."

Steve fished out a couple of cigars, and gave one to each of the men, both of whom appeared willing to accept.

"I'll stay aboard here till he comes," said he, having thus made sure that neither of the

hands would be likely to order him off. "Are you most unloaded?"

"Pretty nigh."

"Get through to-day?"

"Easy," nodded the man. "We'd have wound up yesterday, only for the police taking so much of our time, and bein' in the way."

"Was this where der body was found in der trunk?"

The man nodded again.

At the same moment Steve saw the huge Malay put in an appearance on the forward deck.

He had suddenly issued from some quarter below.

"Who's the nagur?" asked Steve.

"He's one of the hands," replied the boatman.

"He's a corker, ain't he."

"Rather," grinned the man. "He eats a kid about your size for his breakfast about every morning."

"Is that so?" said Steve, dryly. "Mebbe I could get the job for to-morrow morning, if he has no odder one engaged."

"Do you think you'd like?"

"I think he'd find me the toughest little squab he ever tackled."

"His teeth are tolerably good," laughed the boatman.

"He'd need a new set after he'd got through with me," grinned Steve.

"By the way he is looking at you," added the boatman, "I reckon you'd have no trouble making the date with him."

Steve was very careful not to betray himself by too sudden an interest in that direction.

He believed that this Dyak chieftain and cannibal was quite as dangerous and desperate as the old druggist had stated.

He gradually turned his gaze from the man with whom he was talking, and then took a look at the Malay.

The expression on the black face of the savage had undergone a quick change the moment he discovered Steve aboard the barge.

He had recognized him at once as the boy he had noticed on the landing the previous morning, and he had seen him talking with Garrity, and that he afterward departed in company with the detectives.

Even a native of Borneo could put this and that together, and as he abruptly approached the boatmen and Steve, on seeing the latter turn and look at him, the face of the Dyak was not an agreeable picture.

Suspicion was plainly manifest in his intensely black eyes.

"He's coming after you now, kid," laughed the boatman. "You'd better light out."

Steve read aright the look on the native's face, and realized that he indeed was doubtless the cause of the Malay's approach.

But Steve was not the sort of a boy who takes back water.

"I guess I can look out for myself," he rejoined, with no idea whatever of following the boatman's advice.

Then the latter said, jokingly, as the Malay came nearer:

"Here's a youngster who is looking for you, Madok. He'll answer for to-morrow's breakfast."

With the expression on his repulsive features intensified by the boatman's remark, the Malay halted and gazed sharply down at Steve's indifferent face.

"Why look for me?" he demanded, with a deep voice and in his broken English.

"Who's looking for you?" returned Steve, with a laugh. "Go chase yourself. The boatman is giving you a jolly, and you ain't on to it. Get wise, old man."

Evidently, indeed, the Malay did not understand any of this, but he still persisted in his suspicious inquiry.

"Why you here?" he demanded, with a frown.

"None of your business," said Steve, curtly. "Are you the skipper of this craft? Have you got a wheel that you're Admiral Dewey? I'm not looking to steal anything."

"You no looking for anything?"

"Sure, I'm not! What would I be looking for?"

"Me no tell."

"I just came aboard to take the morning air," grinned Steve. "The breeze from the river is good for me health."

"No good if you say bad of Madok!" said the Malay, with a look and movement so significant of cutting Steve's throat then and there that one of the boatmen quickly sprang up and thrust the savage back several paces.

"Get away forward!" he cried, sharply, with a threatening look.

"Me no like——"

"I don't care what you like!" roared the boatman, catching up a stave from the deck. "You get away forward, or I'll break every bone in your infernal ebony hide. The boy's doing no harm here, and you will let him alone. Be off with you, I say!"

The Malay reluctantly obeyed, and slowly returned whence he had come.

But the diabolical look on his face, as he glanced back over his shoulder at the innocent cause of the altercation, was one to have curdled one's blood.

"Much obliged!" said Steve, turning to the boatman. "But I wasn't afraid of him."

"He's a bad stick, just the same," was the reply. "I think he'd cut a man's throat as quickly as I'd cut an orange."

"Where'd he come from?"

"Luscom picked him up from some vessel three or four months ago, and has had him ever since."

"What does he keep such a cutthroat for?"

"Because he can get much work out of him for very little money."

"Is he always on the barge?"

"Most of the time. Once in a while we let him off for a few hours, but he nearly always gets drunk when he has the chance, and then he's a very devil."

"I s'pose you'd miss him if he wasn't here all the time, wouldn't you?" asked Steve, aiming to learn indirectly whether or not the Malay had left the barge for any length of time during the previous day.

And he succeeded admirably.

"Yes, we'd miss him soon enough," replied the boatman, tossing down the stave again, and grimly gazing at the herculean figure of the Malay, who then was lounging over the rail of the barge a dozen yards away.

"He fooled us only yesterday," he added, indifferently, "and sneaked off for nearly an hour."

"Is that so?"

"Luckily he came back here sober, however, or Luscom would have broken his ugly head."

"Mebbe he had an errand," suggested Steve.

"What errand would he have, save to buy rum," growled the boatman.

"He might have had," laughed his companion. "At least, he brought back a bundle with him when he came, all rolled up in a piece of dirty burlap."

"I was not here, then."

"No, I was here alone, Jim," said the other. "You and Luscom had gone up to dinner."

"Mebbe he'd been buying a suit of clothes, or a watermelon," said Steve. "I s'pose he didn't say which?"

"No; and I didn't ask the ugly cuss."

"Does he sleep in der little hole up there in der deck?"

"Little hole, eh?" laughed the boatman, with a curious glance at his companion. "That little hole is the hatch of the fo'castle. Yes, he sleeps down in there."

"All by himself?"

"You don't think any of us would bunk in the same place with him, do you?"

"Well, der ain't no accounting for people's tastes," grinned Steve. "Still, I reckon I wouldn't want to."

He now had learned what he at that moment desired.

He now felt sure that the Malay was the party guilty of the murder, and that he had left the barge the previous day solely for the purpose of following Hogan and committing the crime.

The fact that he had brought back a bundle wrapped in burlap also was significant; and Steve decided that, without any doubt, it contained the severed head of the Malay's victim.

If this could be discovered, the chain of evidence would indeed be complete.

And Steve, despite the desperate appearance of the savage, now resolved to make a hunt for it. With this aim in view he had asked concerning the quarters occupied by the Malay, and he now believed that the missing head would be found there.

"I'll lay low for the chance," he said, to himself, "and slip down there and see."

CHAPTER IX.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

Steve scarce had made the venturesome determination mentioned when the bells and whistles throughout the city told the hour of seven.

These sounds immediately turned the landing into a scene of animation. The half score of men who had been lounging about sprang up to begin work, and the voices of the barge men, the tumbling about of boxes and cases and the incessant rumble of truck wheels combined to drown all lesser sounds.

"Come down this way, Madok!" yelled one of the boatmen, signing for the Malay to ap-

proach. "Come down here and pass up these cases."

The Malay obeyed, but in the sullen fashion of a man with doubts and misgivings on his mind.

The work brought him aft on the barge, and well away from the quarters he occupied.

Before he sprang down among the cases in the hold of the shallow barge he glanced again at Steve and scowled darkly.

"You'll have to get out of the way, boy," cried the boatmen. "Move up yonder, if you are waiting for Luscom, and give us room here to work."

This was just what Steve wanted.

Without a glance in the direction of the Malay, whose head and shoulders only were visible above the hold, Steve walked forward in obedience to the command.

Then he took a stand near the rail, and within a dozen feet of the open hatch entering to the quarters mentioned.

For nearly ten minutes he stood there, apparently gazing at the work of the men on the landing, but all the while furtively watching the busy savage.

"The ugly mug is keeping his lamps on me all the time," he said to himself. "It's a risky job to go down in his joint, but I reckon it's got to be done, and mebbe the boatmen will keep him busy. I think I'll try playing the fox on him."

Waiting several minutes, until he felt sure that the Malay was observing him, Steve suddenly mounted to the rail of the barge and then sprang down upon the landing.

There he was out of sight of the savage.

But he already had discovered a way by which he could watch the native.

Moving along the landing until he could see through the hawser hole, he then could watch the movements of the Malay without being seen.

The latter still was busy passing up the cases of merchandise, and with the clearing and raising of each, which required his stooping into the hold, his head and shoulders disappeared below the deck and remained for several moments.

"I'll take a chance when he's down out of sight, and try to make the move," Steve finally decided, seeing no other way by which it could be accomplished. "If he gets on to it, I'll make a sneak for the landing again, and go for the police."

At the end of another minute Steve saw the chance for which he was waiting.

With a bound he regained the deck of the barge, and shot a swift glance in the direction of the Malay.

The latter still was out of sight in the hold.

Without an instant's hesitation, Steve darted through the open hatch and sprang down into the dismal little fo'castle.

The Malay had not seen him.

Steve found himself in a small, dingy room, the ceiling of which was so low that he easily might have touched it.

At either side there was a wooden bunk, one of which was empty.

The other was half filled with old and musty bedding, in a state of indescribable disorder.

There was no egress from the place but the hatch, and Steve's first thought was of retreat, in case the Malay should unexpectedly approach and discover him.

The forward part of the room was not boarded in, however, and made toward the narrowing prow of the barge.

Nearly at the stem of the craft was a vent hole through the deck, made for the purpose of ventilation.

For some six or eight feet approaching this the space was so narrow that Steve scarce could have jammed himself through it, nor

was the aperture itself sufficiently large for him to have crawled through.

"If the ugly guy finds me here, he'll have me cornered like a rat in a trap," he said to himself, while making a hurried survey of the dismal place. "I guess I'd better work sharp and get out."

Without further delay he began his search.

The place was so small that not much time was required for this.

Within a minute Steve had covered one entire side, and felt hurriedly among the bedding in the opposite bunk.

His efforts proved vain, however, and he began to fear that he was on the wrong track.

Then he caught sight of the edge of a piece of burlap under one corner of the bunk. But the side board ran so close to the floor that no object of any size could have been thrust beneath it.

"It must be in there, just the same!" Steve excitedly muttered, quite forgetting his own danger for the moment.

By throwing off the bedding from the bunk he exposed the boards across the bottom.

One or two of these near the foot were loose, and he quickly removed them.

Then a common wooden bucket with a cover, such as salted and pickled fish are packed in, met his gaze.

Quickly raising it, he set it down on the floor at his feet.

The cover had been tightly put on, but it was not nailed, and by using his knife Steve speedily removed it.

Instantly he beheld the object of his search.

In the little bucket, half covered with discolored brine and pickle, was a human head.

Steve caught his breath for an instant, the sight was so shocking; and then, clapping on the cover, he caught up the bucket and started for the hatch.

"Now, then, if I can get out with it be-

fore the savage tumbles to der little racket——"

But the Malay already had tumbled, though not because of having seen Steve, nor because of suspecting his whereabouts.

His alarm, and his immediate apprehension of the danger by which he was menaced, emanated from another cause.

Wheeling rapidly down the landing, there suddenly had appeared one of the police patrol wagons, containing Chief O'Mara and Inspector Garrity, along with half a dozen blue-coated policemen.

The instant the Malay saw them, he suspected their mission and realized his danger.

His first thought was of the severed head, and that it would surely be found unless removed and disposed of. With the intention of casting it into the river, he instantly left his work and started for the forward hatch.

It was at this moment, too, that Steve started to return to the deck.

Before he could accomplish it, however, he heard the Malay furiously approaching, and at the same time a loud cry by the familiar voice of the chief of detectives, then in the approaching patrol wagon.

"Stop that man!" thundered Chief O'Mara, addressing those on the barge as the Malay ran forward. "Seize that man and hold him!"

Half a dozen started to obey, then drew back with the prospect of a fight with the furious savage, and the Malay ran forward unmolested.

Steve dropped the bucket to the floor, and felt for the moment as if his head was really worth no more than the one at his feet.

Then the dark figure of the Malay obscured the narrow hatch.

This brought out stronger the light from the vent hole forward, and the narrow passage intervening.

This caught Steve's eyes, and he darted in that direction.

At the same moment the Malay landed on the floor, flat upon his back.

His feet had struck the bucket when he sprang down from the deck, and he had been thrown with frightful violence to the floor.

To this mishap alone Steve Manley probably owed his life.

It gave him time to scramble out of the way before the Malay could regain his feet.

The latter was up in a moment, however, and instantly saw what had occurred.

With such a yell as is rarely heard in a civilized community, and with all that was savage and vengeful in him raised to the limit, the Malay caught sight of Steve and snatched a knife from under the bunk nearby.

A scream of terror broke from Steve when the fiend made a dive at him:

"Help! Chief O'Mara, help!"

And then occurred the most curious circumstance of all.

In his wild desire to escape, Steve had jammed himself so far into the narrow space in the prow that the huge Malay was utterly unable to follow him.

At the very best, he could not reach within a foot of the slight figure of the boy, and his savage manifestations of disappointment and rage would beggar description.

The moment that Steve beheld the Malay's curious predicament, and realized that he was out of the man's reach, the more ludicrous side of the situation seized him.

Squeezing himself farther into the narrow passage, he looked back over his shoulder and shouted, tauntingly:

"Go chase yourself! You're a misfit for a place like this. Why don't you come in? The door's open!"

"Me kill! me kill! me kill!" shrieked the Malay, in a horrible frenzy of rage.

"You've done your killing," yelled Steve. "It'll come the other way, now. Cut yerself

in half and come in here in sections. Don't yer know this is a private way and dangerous passing?"

But the taunts were fairly drowned by the cries of fury issuing from the Malay, who now drew back his arm and for an instant poised the knife between his thumb and finger.

"Don't you throw that at me!" yelled Steve, with renewed apprehension.

But the Malay did not throw it.

Before his uplifted arm could move, the report of a revolver rang through the place, and a bullet had broken the Malay's wrist.

The next moment Garrity and three of the policemen came pouring down through the narrow hatch.

To their surprise the Malay offered no further resistance.

With a composure that was alike savage and dignified, and with utter indifference to what must have been a frightfully painful wound, he suffered himself to be arrested and taken out on deck.

Nor did he thereafter show the slightest interest in what might befall him; and when, two months later, he met the death to which he was legally condemned, it was met with the same grim dignity and stoical indifference which characterized him from the moment in which he realized that his end was inevitable.

Before he was executed, however, he was prevailed upon to make in his rude way a statement of the cause for such a crime.

It proved to be very nearly what old Zenas Wagstaff had conjectured.

On his last trip to Borneo, nearly two years previous, old Captain Hogan had committed an outrage against one of the native islanders, and this man had followed him even to America to avenge the wrong.

It had taken him nearly the entire interval to locate Hogan, and the latter had seen the

Malay aboard the barge when it was being hauled up to the landing. He did not then think that he had been seen, however, and not until he reached I street did he discover that he was pursued.

Then he had resorted to the short cut through the alley, hoping thus to reach Leary's back door before he could be overtaken.

The Malay caught him on the dump-heap, however, weak and out of breath, and the crime was committed almost within the moment.

Though many afterward said that they had seen the Malay pass through the streets, none thought of his being in pursuit of Hogan, or of ascribing to him the old seaman's death.

Cleaving to his native custom, the savage had boldly removed Hogan's head in a piece of burlap found on the dump, and left the body in the trunk, as described.

With the intention of throwing trunk and

all into the river, he had returned at night and succeeded in conveying it as far as the landing. Before he could do more, however, he had heard the two workmen approaching in the skiff, and had delayed until they should pass.

Instead, they had hauled directly up to the landing and remained there until morning, thus giving the Malay no alternative but that of leaving the trunk where it stood.

Though efforts were made to accomplish it, it never could be proved that Hogan left any money; but if he did, and if crafty Tim Leary did indeed secure it, he enjoyed it undiscovered.

But perhaps Leary had as good a right to it as any other man; and Satan, it is said, does not always prove false to his own.

THE END.

Next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 21) will contain "\$10,000 Reward; or, Steve Manley in a New Rôle."

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